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MEMORANDUM

Tito's Time of Troubles

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17 November 1972

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

17 November 1972

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Tito's Time of Troubles

It is perhaps too soon to begin wringing hands, in the manner of a recent commentary in The Economist ("Yugoslavia's liberalism is being thrown out of the window"), but the news from Belgrade is in fact quite disquieting. There are three principal concerns in the West and none of them is entirely without foundation. The first is that the recent wave of enforced resignations of high level political figures, together with Tito's emphasis on the need for a return to authoritarian principles within the Communist party, may herald a purge of liberal, pro-Western leaders and a turnabout in Yugoslavia's two-decade-old reformist course. The second is that the recent improvement in Yugoslavia's relations with Moscow may presage Yugoslavia's drift into the waiting arms of the USSR. And the third is that Tito's current campaign to preserve federal unity may have come too late and be too harsh; it may fail to revivify the Communist party but succeed in enervating the nation.

Tito's Problems

1. The origins of the current upset in Yugoslavia can be traced back to the crisis in Croatia of last December. That event

* *This memorandum was prepared by the Office of National Estimates and coordinated with OCI and the Clandestine Service, which are in general agreement with its judgments.*

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seems in retrospect to have constituted a watershed in postwar Yugoslav political history. It apparently ended what might be called the era of federal optimism -- the phase of official, Titoist confidence in the ability of the single federated state to survive the various regional threats to its existence, even while the authority of the central government and party was deliberately being reduced. And it began a period of retrenchment, intended in the main to cut back the powers of the constituent republics, to reassert the authority of the central organs of the Communist party, and to do so while the great national father figure, Tito, is still in command.

2. Tito has in fact been assailing "rotten liberalism" and demanding party unity and discipline for the past ten months. But outside of Croatia, where the problem has been met head on, many have seemed reluctant to listen: there was perhaps a feeling that the old man didn't really mean what he was saying or lacked the will and the power to implement his program. In any case, the leaders of the Serbian party last month resisted Tito's efforts to have them crack down on local non-conformists and ignored his insistence that they accept the precepts of "democratic centralism". They resented his effort to reimpose strong central authority over the affairs of their hitherto largely autonomous (but cooperative) party and informed Tito that they could not obey him. Perhaps Tito should have avoided

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pressing the issue to this point -- there is no evidence to suggest that the Serbian leaders were the least bit anxious to engage him in a test of strength. But once Tito was confronted with a direct challenge to his authority he obviously felt he had no choice. And so he seized the members of the Serbian Central Committee by the scruff of the neck and somehow persuaded or forced them (we don't know which) to vote their own leaders out of office.

3. Though there will be other terms used to describe what is taking place, and though few if any of those forced to resign face trial in a court of law, Tito has in fact instituted a purge and he has done so for the usual reasons -- to rid the party of those who would deny the right of the central leadership to enforce its will. The purge at various levels of the state and party apparatuses in Croatia consumed some 800 functionaries. The purge which began early last month in Serbia has as yet to affect nearly so many, but the process which started at the top has begun both to move down into the ranks and to move out from this particular republic. Since the beginning of October, twelve quite prominent figures from Serbia, Macedonia, and Slovenia -- including five members of the large national party Presidium -- have been forced to resign or have resigned in protest. In the latter category was former foreign

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minister Koca Popovic, a Serbian who was an old friend and comrade-in-arms of Tito himself.

4. Withal, there can be little doubt that Tito's intentions are by his own standards honorable. Others will deplore his methods, believe his actions high-handed, find his assumptions questionable, and consider his timing a great deal less than perfect. Those (like the editors of *The Economist* and probably not a few Yugoslavs as well) who have looked forward to the uninterrupted evolution of democracy in the Socialist Federated Republic of Yugoslavia, will find Tito's current policies especially alarming, even vaguely Stalinist. But his purpose is in a sense "pure" and -- even were he too in favor of Western-style democracy, which of course he is not -- Tito would remind his critics that to allow the nationalists of Croatia and Serbia to rule without restraint from the center would simply make certain that there would ultimately be no Yugoslavia in which the democratic process could unfold.

5. And Tito has much more to complain about than centrifugal tendencies in the body politic. The Yugoslav economy is misbehaving in a number of ways: inflation is running at about 15 percent or more this year, in the manner, only worse, of a non-Socialist Western economy; foreign trade, in what is now practically a

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tradition, is flowing much more in than out; some individual enterprises are running up large deficits, others are spending profits for frivolous purposes, rather than reinvesting them; the backward southern republics are still backward and the prosperous northerners still resent having to help them out; and the rate of unemployment remains high, eased only by the large-scale emigration of Yugoslav workers to other countries, especially West Germany. Beyond all this, an old transgression, private entrepreneurism, which has important ideological as well as economic and social overtones, seems to be proliferating -- *inter alia*, the *new* new class has been speculating in real estate, amassing substantial wealth, hoarding some of it in banks, and blowing the rest of it on fancy and conspicuous villas on the Dalmatian coast. Yet another problem, of quite a different order, has also increasingly unsettled the regime of late: the Ustashi (Croatian fascist) exiles have stepped up their campaign of terror abroad and recently even moved it right into the heart of Bosnia itself.*

In Perspective

6. Tito has been trying for two decades to fashion a new and brighter philosophy of "socialism", partly because he came genuinely

* *See ONE Memorandum, "Yugoslavia -- the Ustashi and the Croatian Separatist Problem", 27 September 1972, CONFIDENTIAL.*

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to detest the ideas and practices of Stalinism, partly in order to give the Yugoslavs something else to believe in -- something that would unify and inspire. To the extent that Titoist tenets have worked in Yugoslavia they have done so largely on the basis of their nationalistic and utilitarian, not doctrinal, appeal. Compared to Leninism and Maoism, for example, Titoism is pragmatic, uncertain, lackluster -- hence commands no fanatics and arouses few frenzies of dedication. (As a fount of ideological inspiration, Titoism has provided greater nourishment elsewhere, especially in the Soviet-dominated states of Eastern Europe.) In this sense, Titoist Communism has failed to contribute substantially to the spirit of Yugoslav unity.

7. Up to a point, nationalism represented an alternative source of spiritual strength. It was a great force for federal unity, so long as it was directed against hostile outside forces, such as the USSR. But there is a large problem inherent in the Titoist emphasis on nationalism: there are other kinds of nationalism -- Croatian, Serbian, Macedonian, etc. -- which flourish in Yugoslavia, and they are directed essentially against one another and against Belgrade. And there are related problems associated with Tito's brand of pragmatic socialism -- the lack of a sense of

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shared purpose, a general unwillingness to make sacrifices for the sake of a common cause.

8. The Titoist notion -- which underlay all the recent constitutional reforms -- was that the way to deal with the forces of nationalism and with regional urges for greater independence was to accommodate them. Emphasis in recent years was on decentralization -- political, economic, even to some extent military. It was thought, roughly speaking, that the restless intellectuals could be won with liberal reforms and the republican nationalists constrained with kindness. It was also thought that new and highly elaborate federal structures -- e.g., the collective, 23-man State Presidency which is drawn from all the regions and republics -- would serve to maintain central authority, even after Tito was gone. But the events in Zagreb last year alerted Tito to serious weaknesses in federal authority and to the fact that, in Croatia and perhaps elsewhere, the general mood was changing; old animosities and fears -- of, for example, Serbian chauvinism -- had supplanted the Russian menace as the fright of first order.

9. Developments in Croatia also reminded Tito that there is in Yugoslavia an unhappy overlapping of the views of those who are inclined to be pro-Western, liberal, and anti-Soviet, and those who

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tend to be more or less militant regional and republican nationalists. Both elements in effect favor the weakening of the power of the party and state at the federal level. The liberals wish to see the further evolution of the pluralist society, the development in one form or another of an essentially democratic socialist regime. They would open the door to strong, at least tacitly anti-Communist influences from the West. The nationalists (excluding the extremists, who would cheerfully see the total dissolution of the Yugoslav state) hold varying views about the desirability of democratic processes but agree that the first order of business is the further strengthening of republican autonomy. To oversimplify, the liberals favor more power for the people, the nationalists advocate more power for the provinces. Tito, understandably, finds both points of view menacing: the liberals would destroy "socialism", the nationalists would wreck Yugoslavia. Tito feels then that he must move against both if his and the party's authority are to endure.

10. Tito also feels that his problems -- though they were most acute in Croatia -- are truly Yugoslav problems, that the country-at-large (not just Croatia) and the party as a whole (not just the Croatian) need a good, sound shaking. As was noted at the

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time of the Croatian events:*

> While declaring that the fundamentals of the Yugoslav system will be retained, he has nonetheless announced his determination to find ways to prevent a recurrence [of the Croatian affair]. He evidently feels (and rightly so) that the Party, which he had counted on to behave as a unifying national force, was especially remiss -- both in Zagreb (where its leaders either failed to act or actually joined the wrong side) and in Belgrade (where it seemed unable to take decisive action). He may also be aware that his own failure to provide active leadership in recent months was in part responsible for the party's inertia. In any case, Tito is now prepared to focus on the question of the Party and its role in national life.

11. Specifically, Tito is trying to force the party to use the power it already possesses in theory, though has not used in recent practice, and to assume the responsibility for national unity which it has over the years tended to ignore. He has denounced the long-held notion and officially sanctioned article of faith that the party can properly perform its duties as an instrument of influence (playing only a "guiding role" in society) rather than as a pre-eminent political force (exercising ultimate authority whenever and wherever necessary). Because he still believes that doctrine can ultimately demolish the regional nationalisms, he has emphasized that the party and the nation must heed and respect the

* *ONE Memorandum, "The Crisis in Croatia", 5 January 1972, page 11, CONFIDENTIAL.*

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ideology of socialism. And thus, while still maintaining that the system can to a degree be democratized and decentralized, he has demanded that the party become the most powerful single institution and the leading inspirational force in Yugoslav society, completely free of the influences of provincial nationalism and bourgeois liberalism.

The Russian Angle

12. This is about where the Russians come in. Tito's increasingly black thoughts about pro-Western liberals please Moscow for obvious reasons. His campaign against the nationalists also pleases it, at least on the doctrinal level, and otherwise causes it no particular pain.* And, in general, Tito's urgent back-tracking on precisely those matters which have for so long been of of public concern to the Soviets -- his toleration of dissent and his devotion to decentralization -- must seem in Moscow to be a gratifying spectacle. But the Russians have not, so far as we know, directly interfered in any way. (Indirectly, though, they have emphatically

* *For good reasons of their own, the Russians do not care for dissident ethnic minorities nor overtly advocate the breakup of existing unified states anywhere. Moreover, in the case of Yugoslavia, they recognize that the militant nationalists are inclined to resist all outside influences, including Soviet influences. But this is not to say that the USSR would ignore a good opportunity to try to turn, say, Croat or Serb separatism to its own advantage, circumstances (say in the post-Tito era) permitting.*

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endorsed Tito by encouraging closer relations and by agreeing to provide substantial economic assistance.)

13. Moscow is of course aware that there are still "conservative" Communists in Yugoslavia who would welcome a return to more orthodox ideas and systems, and it would be happy to extend at least moral support to such folk. But it knows full well that there is no longer any pro-Russian faction in the Yugoslav party, no element which can be counted on at this time consciously to advance Soviet interests in Belgrade, the Balkans, or anywhere else. Moscow also knows better than anyone else that the Soviet-Yugoslav rapprochement this year is almost entirely the consequence of initiatives on the Soviet side and *not* the result of any change of heart by Tito.* Tito has been saying consistently since 1955 that he can get along with Russia if only the Russians manage to behave themselves, i.e., do not threaten Yugoslav independence and, secondarily, do not seek to destroy the sovereignty (of whatever degree) of his East European neighbors.

* *In September 1971, following a period of severe strain in the relationship, Brezhnev visited Yugoslavia, reconfirmed the validity of the Belgrade and Moscow Declarations of 1955 and 1956 (which in effect pledged the USSR to respect Yugoslav independence), and in general signalled a conciliatory turn in Soviet policy. Since then, the Russians have among other things extended at least $500 million (and perhaps much more) in new credits, and the Bulgarians -- no doubt at Soviet behest -- have stopped their public agitation of the highly sensitive issue of Macedonia.*

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14. So much the better, of course, if the Russians, while turning an amiable face to the Yugoslavs, are at the same time moving to improve their relations with Western Europe and the United States. (The Yugoslavs have enjoyed good relations with the West for years and -- though Tito may campaign for a time against bourgeois Western inroads -- Belgrade has no intention of sacrificing these relations for the sake of closer ties with Moscow.) Finally, the Soviet leaders seem to understand that their influence in Yugoslavia will be severely limited so long as Tito reigns and that -- at least in the near term -- efforts to enhance that influence necessarily must follow the route which has become conventional in the Third World rather than the path worn by Big Brother in Eastern Europe.

Some Implications of the Current Trying Period

15. Put in these perspectives, neither Tito's purges of officialdom nor his willingness to cooperate with the Soviets need be found especially disturbing. It could be that the party does in fact need to be shaken up if it is to become an effective force for national unity. And it could be that better relations with the USSR will ultimately redound to Yugoslavia's benefit, without in the process compromising Belgrade's independence. Nevertheless, there are worrisome aspects to the current round of dismissals of high

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level officials and disturbing implications and questions associated with the general trend of Titoist policies.

16. First, the move against top people in Serbia threatens to strip the party of a body of competent executives and to alienate a substantial proportion of those functionaries who are otherwise unaffected. Understandably, there does not now seem to be a large residue of able leaders anxious to substitute for the disgraced first team.* (The *first* first team in Serbia was purged some years ago after the dismissal of the conservative superstar, Alexander Rankovic.)

17. Second, one is entitled to entertain some doubt that the current wave of purges is being interpreted by the party faithful as an "objective necessity", as, for example, the earlier purge of Croatians seems to have been. No one has accused the ousted Serbians of holding separatist views or of condoning the activities of those who did: charges against them referred vaguely to "unhealthy" situations and failures to pursue the "class enemy". So what is all the

* *One of the two new men at the top in Serbia, for example, apparently moved almost directly into his party post from his previous position as a practicing (proletarian) locksmith. Tito has explained that people of this sort may not be well-known to the nation but are well-known to the "workers of Serbia". He apparently feels that the question of competence is now subordinate to the question of loyalty and that workers are more likely to prove reliable in this regard than the members of the intelligentsia they are replacing.*

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commotion about? The Serbs may suspect that part of Tito's motive here is simply to make the disgruntled Croats a little less unhappy. And there are probably others who see in all this the signs of some sort of personal vendetta.

18. Third, there are overtones in these purges which suggest to some that Tito means to turn the clock back to a much more repressive period in Yugoslav history. Tito promised last month that there would be no return to Stalinism but also condemned the "euphoria of democratization" which he claimed began to develop in the party in the early 1950s. Moreover, some of Tito's closest companions are now ominously calling for severe curbs on the independence of economic enterprises; for an end to the system of direct election of members of the National Assembly; for a reduction in the relative independence of the judiciary; and for a revision of the criminal code so as to ensure the conviction of the "enemies of socialism".

19. Finally, it is questionable that Tito in the time remaining to him will be able to reassert the party's authority over the other elements and forces which shape Yugoslav life and determine the national destiny. In the confusion and enthusiasm accompanying the introduction and development of Yugoslavia's decentralized system,

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the party has over time surrendered much of its power. This will be difficult to restore. Some elements of the party seem to have lost the habit of command. Many party officials seem to have other interests and owe their first loyalties to other institutions or to local constituencies. And many regional party organizations seem to have been swept up in a rising tide of nationalism and blinded by a growing pre-occupation with the economic self-interests of their individual provinces and republics.

20. There is, moreover, a basic contradiction -- or quandary -- inherent in Tito's new approach. It is one thing to hold the army in reserve as the final guarantor of federal integrity; this need not directly affect the course of decentralization and so-called self-management. It is quite another to demand that a single, centralized, and authoritarian body, the party, actively participate in and ultimately control the entire process. What could be the meaning of a program of decentralization which is run firmly -- and without real statutory restraint -- from the center?

21. The question is, broadly put, can Yugoslavia somehow strike a balance between the need for central authority and the urge for pluralistic achievement? Can the system preserve its unique identity as a "self-managing" socialist system if the theory

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and practice of self-management are assaulted by the man, Tito, who practically invented both? The recently dismissed head of the Serbian party, Marko Nikezic, has claimed that the basic achievement of Yugoslavia's self-managing system is that political problems have been solved by "general agreement". The greatest potential danger to this marvelous achievement, he says, would be a trend toward a concentration of power in the "professional political structure", i.e., the party and state apparats. Nikezic believes that Yugoslavia needs "further democratization" at all levels of society, *not* a return to "centralism" and "direct exercise of power by the party". The party, he feels (and so stated publicly in September) should try to strengthen the trade unions and other mass organizations rather than seek to draw more power to itself. Nikezic clearly fears, as no doubt do many other Yugoslavs, that Tito's present remedies will ultimately destroy what is truly worthwhile in the whole Yugoslav experiment.

What of the Resolution?

22. [redacted] in Belgrade also takes a dark view. He believes that some of the problems Yugoslavia is facing -- economic indiscipline, inefficiency, and corruption -- certainly demand some

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sort of "drastic action". But, in his view, Tito has unfortunately "dramatized the situation to near crisis proportions" by calling for a kind of Yugoslav cultural revolution.

> The forces (mainly Yugoslav human nature) which have resisted Tito's previous attempts at a general tightening up are very strong, but this time he seems to be attacking with the urgency of a man who has not much time left. If he continues, there is an obvious danger that abuses and excesses will be attacked with much too blunt instruments, destroying the energy and enterprise which have been the mainsprings of Yugoslav development in recent years and damaging, perhaps seriously, an economy now propelled by forces which he does not begin to understand.

23. There are cogent reasons to entertain a less gloomy view. Tito -- Nikezic's [redacted] fears notwithstanding -- may have no intention of returning all power to the party and no desire whatsoever to oversee even a diminutive cultural revolution. Tito should know when to stop, even turn back, before the process of disruption becomes irreversible. He is not, after all, a novice at this sort of thing, nor would it be in character for him in a moment of pique to abandon the fundamentals of the Yugoslav course: innovative, pragmatic, and (relatively) humane socialism and absolute national sovereignty. Tito certainly wishes these fundamentals to survive his own passing, and he has in effect designated the party as his successor. Only the party, he feels, can carry on -- preserve the Titoist treasury, guard Yugoslav independence,

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prevent federal disintegration. But, to carry on, the party must be reinvigorated, made strong, and somehow given the kind of charisma and authority that Tito himself has so long enjoyed.

24. The test will come of course after Tito goes. And it now appears that the severity of the test will be greatly affected by the timing of Tito's departure and by the response of the party to Tito's current round of pressures and purges. The recent crisis in the party and the federal system, and the general political confusion attending it, would no doubt greatly complicate the succession problem if it should present itself soon. And even in the long run, the party is not likely to become the kind of disciplined, dedicated, unifying force Tito envisages. It can and probably will come to play a somewhat more effective national role than it has in the immediate past, but -- especially without Tito -- it will almost certainly have to continue to accommodate itself to the pressures of a pluralist society.

25. All things considered -- assuming in particular that Tito is given time, another year or more -- our previous estimates would still appear to be valid: Yugoslavia, as a single state, *can* outlast Tito. Many of the fears, ideas, and forces which have helped to bind the country together under Tito will persist even in his absence. Fear of outside pressure and interference, particularly from the USSR,

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will endure, at least beneath the surface. The Titoist heritage -- thirty or so years of Yugoslav survival in the face of war, cold war, and adversity -- will no doubt remain a strong source of truly national pride. The developing Yugoslav economy, with all its faults, will continue to provide the citizenry, the politicians, and even the regionalists with a heavy stake in federal survival. Finally, the concern that the small individual successor states of the Yugoslav union could not by themselves be prosperous or secure will continue to persuade many Yugoslavs that the unified state, in one form or another, must be preserved.

26. All this assumes, of course, that Tito's judgment has not been impaired by age, that Tito is still in control of himself and of the nation's political processes. We suppose, in other words, that Tito's present approach is not irresponsible and eccentric or worse, as some have lately suggested. But we should add that these assumptions cannot now be made with absolute assurance: Tito is in his 81st year, and there are -- perhaps inevitably -- stories that he is declining mentally. There are also good reports to the contrary. While it does not seem probable, it could be that his faculties *are* deteriorating and if so, he could do a great deal of damage before he dies or is removed from office.

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27. Presuming, however, that Tito remains a rational man, and that his intentions are not so dire as his critics suspect, the party and the people are likely over time to bend slowly to his views, grudgingly and not all the way but far enough to ease Tito's anxieties and to restore life to something akin to the not entirely satisfactory or solvent norm. Yugoslavia will return to its own variety of self-managed muddling through. And given half a chance -- and reasonably good mental health -- Tito would probably much rather spend the last years of his life acting like a benevolent monarch than a dictator of the proletariat.

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